Write A Catalyst

The Strange Afterlife of #FreeTheNipple: From Feminist Protest to Thirst Trap Economy

How the endless hustle for clicks turned a middle finger to the man into just another product he could sell

Sayyida Shaheen Noor Follow 6 min read · Aug 16, 2025

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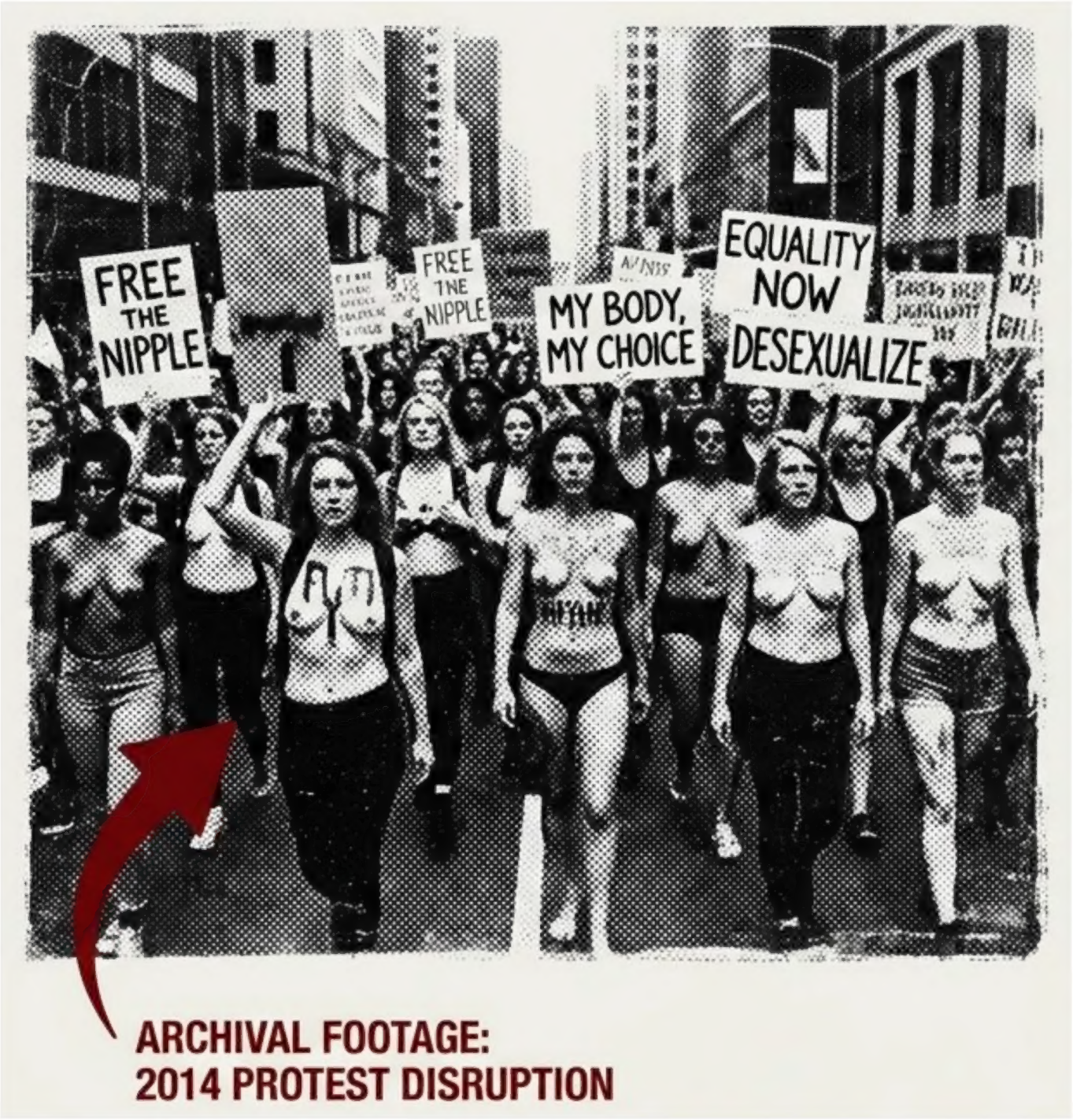

Alright, let's get this straight.

There was a time, and it wasn't that long ago, when a woman going topless in public was like throwing a brick through a window. It was a real *f**k you*. It short-circuited the whole damn system, the one that says a guy's nipple is fine for a beer commercial but ours is basically porn. That's what #FreeTheNipple was supposed to be about. It was about desexualizing our

own bodies, taking them back from the droolers, and pointing out how completely absurd it is that there are actual laws about this. It was supposed to be a revolution.

Now? Go scroll through that hashtag. Just try it. It's not revolution. It's a goddamn catalogue. A perfectly curated, commodified, ass-shaking spectacle. The anger is gone.

The whole thing's been betrayed. And not by the cops or some right-wing politician. Nope. It was an inside job. It was hijacked by pornstars, OnlyFans hustlers, and a whole new breed of narcissist who thinks personal branding is a political statement. The soul of the movement got ripped out and replaced with a link-in-bio.

I've been watching this happen for years, and I guess it's time to perform the autopsy.

So, Who Are the Vultures?

You gotta understand who wrecked the place to see how they did it. They all wave the feminist flag, but trust me, it's not about empowerment. It's about way older, simpler shit.

1. The "Empowered" Entrepreneur (aka The OnlyFans Grifter)

Look, I'm not here to shame sex work, but lets be real. The entire business model for these women is based on their bodies being as sexualized as possible. They aren't trying to dismantle the system of objectification; they're trying to become CEO of it. For them, #FreeTheNipple isn't a protest, it's an ad. It's a free sample to lure customers back to their subscription page. They're using the language of social justice to funnel political sympathy into

their bank accounts. It's brilliant, in a completely cynical way. They didn't free the nipple, they just put a new price tag on it and called it liberation.

2. The Digital Flasher (aka The Thirsty One)

This one is less about money and more about the void. This is the girl who posts a topless pic with some vague, inspiring quote, and her real goal has nothing to do with changing laws. She just needs to be **seen**. She's terrified of being ignored. The likes, the fire emojis, the creepy DMs... that's not political victory, that's her drug. It's a hit of validation. She gets a thrill from "breaking the rules" and mistakes that little head rush for freedom. She doesn't want to destroy the male gaze; she wants to be its favorite student.

3. The Activist-Influencer (aka The Main Character)

Oh, this type is the most insidious of them all. Let me illustrate with one example: a former spokesperson for Gotopless, who served as the "face" of the Annual Gotopless Day Parades during my time.

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A flame-haired dynamo, she cloaks her ego in the language of the revolution. The cause is just a backdrop, a stage for her to perform on. Every protest is a photo-op. Every media interview is about *her* brave struggle. The activism is just a vehicle for the activist. She's obsessed with the *idea* of being a revolutionary—the romantic image of the defiant woman standing alone. She needs a villain so she can play the hero. Actual, boring, systemic change is

an afterthought. The goal isn't to win the war, it's to get a really cool, defiant picture for her Instagram while the battle is raging. She doesn't want freedom, she wants a documentary made about her.

Ms Rachel Jessee, spokesperson for GoTopless, addressing participants in the Annual GoTopless Day Parade, 27 August 2017, New York City. This was the last parade I walked.

How It All Went to Hell

Think about the vibe shift. It's so obvious.

It started as: **This is a political act to change a law.** The individual person didn't matter as much as the collective point.

Then it became: **Look at me, the brave activist, doing the political act.** The focus shifted from the cause to the person doing it. The performance

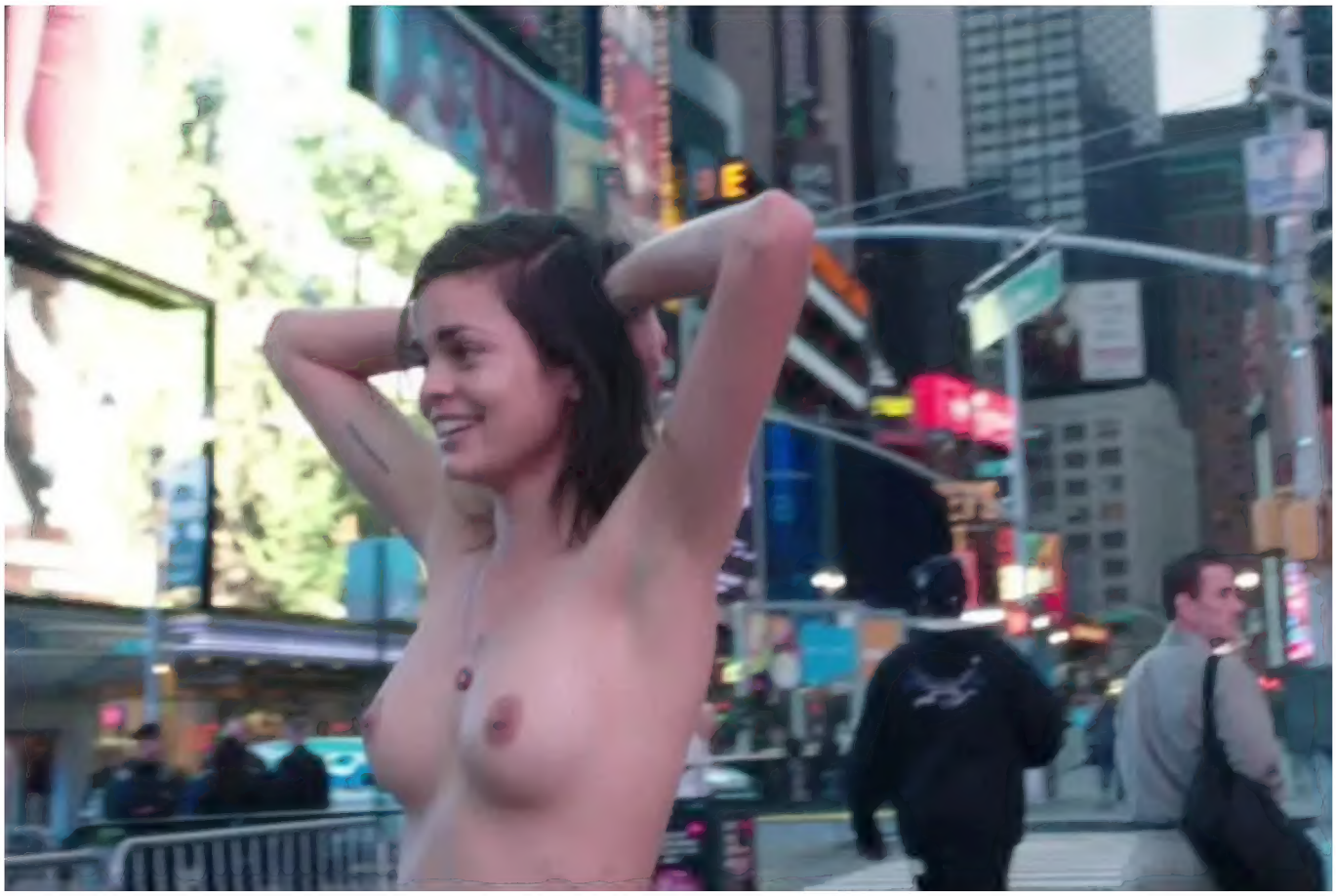
became the point.

Then it slid into: **This is my personal self-expression.** The politics got watered down into a vague "my body, my choice" platitude. It became more about aesthetics and feeling empowered than actually, you know, gaining power.

And now we're here: **Please look at me.** The political hashtag is just a flimsy shield to get around censors and get attention. It's pure narcissistic supply.

And the final stop on the trainwreck: **Please pay me.** It's fully commercial. The nipple is re-sexualized for profit, which is the exact opposite of the entire founding principle. It's a feedback loop of cringe. The more it's used for clicks and cash, the more meaningless it becomes as a symbol of protest.

You're Not Smashing the Patriarchy, You're Giving It Better Content



Lina Esco, an actress, director, and #FreeTheNipple star, poses for the paparazzi in Times Square.

This is the part that really kills me. The whole point was to confront the Gaze, to make it look stupid, to rob it of its power. You were supposed to stand there and, by being normal, expose how perverse the onlooker was. Your body was a battlefield.

Today's version *courts* the Gaze. It performs for it. The perfect angle, the perfect lighting, the pouty lips. It's an image crafted for maximum consumption. They really think they're in control, "owning their sexuality" or whatever. It's a joke. You're just leasing it back from the same system that built the prison in the first place. You haven't escaped. You've just redecorated your cell with feminist posters and started selling tickets.

Listen. I dont care if a woman sells pictures of her body. That's not the issue. The issue is when you co-opt the language and symbols of a real liberation

movement to do it. You're moving backwards while patting yourself on the back for being so progressive.

> They confused being seen with being free. And in this online hellscape, those two things are almost never the same.

To fix this, if it *can* even be fixed, we have to start calling bullshit. We have to ask the hard question: who does this actually benefit?

Does it benefit all women fighting a sexist legal system? Or does it benefit a Patreon link?

The breast itself isn't radical. The *intent* is what makes it radical. And right now, the intent isn't revolution. It's a desperate bid for clicks. That's way more obscene than any bare breast could ever be. The revolution wasn't supposed to be Instagrammable. But here we are.

Let's be real. The revolution was not televised; it was posted on Instagram with a brand sponsorship. We all thought we were sticking it to the (wo)man, breaking down puritanical barriers with our tits. But the man just opened a separate tab, took notes, and figured out how to sell our rebellion back to us at a 30% markup. It's the oldest story in the book, we just thought a hashtag would somehow make it different this time. It didn't.

(*And yeah, I know I sound bitter. Maybe I am. But watching a movement I gave four prime years of my life to get turned into OnlyFans marketing material will do that to you.*)

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Written by Sayyida Shaheen Noor

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Psychologist. Dreamer. Freedom fighter for women's inner & outer liberation. Toronto via Peshawar. Chai > coffee. Writing the revolution one sentence at a time.

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Responses (2)

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Max Dancona + 23 others
Nov 18, 2025

Why do you want to desexualize women?

This effort is not only impossible, it is not desirable. The Puritans tried it. The victorians tried it. Many ascetic religious movements have tried to strip sexuality out of human experience. It never works.

Sexuality is part of what makes us human. That is why these attempt to stamp out sexual desire never work.

10 Hide replies

Sayyida Shaheen Noor she/her Author
Mar 7 (edited)

Thanks for the thoughtful comment back on Nov 18. Sorry for the very late reply!

I don't want to desexualize women; I want to desexualize the gaze that turns autonomy into commodity. The nipple was meant to be neutral, not neutered.

What if the revolution isn't erasure, but ownership? Curious for your take.

Hide replies

Max Dancona + 23 others
Mar 7

Sexual desire is not only part of human nature, it has been essential for human survival.

Modern societies now have the idea that women don't have to give birth. This is a new idea, pre-industrial societies depended on women giving birth, and societies that didn't somehow persuade or pressure women to have 4 or 5 children on average literally went extinct.

Western culture has long tried to regulate human sexual desire. And it has long failed.

I am not sure the difference between the "male gaze" and sexual desire. They seem closely related if not synonymous.

10 More replies >

Patrick Elliott
Aug 18, 2025 (edited)

And then.. somehow people that actually do talk politics, actually are arguing about the problem, really do strive to see change, well, they get their posts blocked, their accounts suspended, etc., even when they literally follow all the rules, and even, in the case of one of them, when the video is a short discussion they posted about the recent loss of a family member, and they have all but given up on posting anything at all "topless" on their channels, due to it always getting flagged by some bunch of idiots as "porn". (On almost

every site on the internet, including the ones that allow nudity, and have no problem at all letting outright nudity to be posted, by other people, who, I can only assume, get by with this by not making it "political".)

Its not all an inside job. But, the ones on the outside - they have no problem with the pornstars, OnlyFans hustlers, etc. But someone actually being political, and talking about issues, including equality? That can't be abided, and any excuse, including claiming they are posting porn, when they are literally only topless, while doing an interview with someone, or, even more insane, completely clothed, and talking about entirely non-political subjects is acceptable to remove them from public view.

I.e., the stripper is fine, but the mouthy person, who only shows their tits and actually wants change - that is unacceptable.

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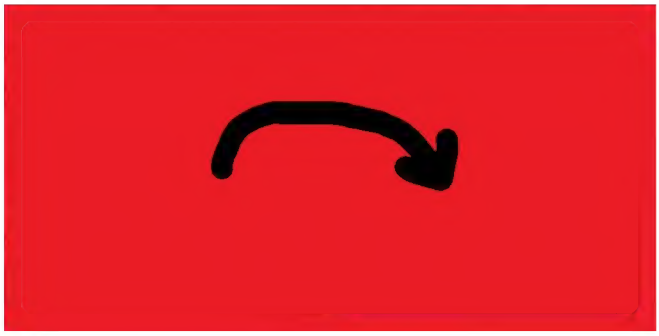

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I can't say it any more clearly than that

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